Adovacrius

(fl. c. 460)

BRIEFING

Odoacer (Adovacrius ; Latin: Adovacrius; 5th century) was a Saxon leader and military commander who, in the 460s, attacked the possessions of the Western Roman Empire in the Loire River valley with his warriors.

BIOGRAPHY

Historical Sources

The main narrative source about Odoacer is the " History of the Franks " by Gregory of Tours. The accounts of all other Frankish sources [English] - the "Chronicle" of Fredegar and the " Book of the History of the Franks " - are probably based on the work of this author. In turn, it is assumed that Gregory of Tours himself drew information about the events that took place more than a century ago in the Loire Valley from the "Annals of Angers", which have not survived to this day.

Odoacer's Wars with the Romans and Franks

According to Gregory of Tours, in the early 460s, the Saxons, who had established themselves at the mouth of the Loire, began to raid the surrounding lands, for control of which the Visigoth king Theodoric II and the ruler of the Soissons region, Aegidius , were also fighting. The conflict between the most powerful rulers of Roman Gaul at that time probably contributed to the success of the Saxon attacks. According to Gregory of Tours, soon after the Battle of Orleans in 463, Odoacer's Saxons attacked Angers (Andecavus; Latin: Andecavus). After the death of Aegidius, who died in 464 or 465, Odoacer again threatened Angers and forced the townspeople to give him hostages. The inhabitants of "other places" were also forced to do the same. In exchange, Odoacer probably promised the Roman governor of the Soissons region (possibly Syagrius or Paulus) to refrain from attacks on Roman possessions, since there is no information in historical sources about the activities of the Loire Saxons over the next few years.

However, in 469 or 470, Odoacer, for unknown reasons, broke the peace treaty with the Western Romans and approached Angers. Gregory of Tours's History of the Franks reports that Count Paulus led the city's defense against the Saxons. The Frankish historian described subsequent events as follows: " When Odoacer arrived in Angers, King Childeric arrived there the next day and, after Paulus was killed, captured the city ." Gregory of Tours also mentioned that on the same day, the residence of the local bishop burned down in a great fire in Angers . The Book of the History of the Franks and Fredegar's work claim that the Franks defeated the Saxons without Roman help, and that after the victory, Childeric I killed Paulus and captured Angers.

Analyzing the texts of these sources, some modern researchers suggest that Paul died in battle with the Saxons, while others suggest that the Roman commander was killed on the orders of the ruler of the Salian Franks, Childeric I. Historians are unanimous only in the fact that as a result of these events, the Saxons were never able to establish their power over Angers.

The History of the Franks also reports that the war between the Saxons and the Romans continued for some time. During these military actions, the Saxons were defeated and suffered heavy losses, and " their islands were captured and devastated by the Franks, with many people perishing ." However, Gregory of Tours did not mention who the leader of these Saxons was. Later, King Childeric I entered into an alliance with Odoacer to fight the Alemanni, against whom the two rulers conducted successful military operations.

Identification of Odoacer

In Gregory of Tours's work, Odoacer is referred to only as the leader of a force of Saxons, but in a number of modern historians' works he is given the title "king" (Latin: rex [English]). Historians debate who these "Saxons" were. One possibility being considered is that they may have been Anglo-Saxons , who migrated first to Britain and then to the Brittany Peninsula.

Odoacer, Ruler of Italy

Gregory of Tours's work provides no information about Odoacer's origins or early life. This allows some researchers to identify the Saxon leader with his much more famous namesake, King Odoacer of Italy . These assumptions are supported by both onomastic data (the similarity of the names of these two individuals: Adovacrius and Eadwacer —the leader of the Saxons, Odovacrius —the king of Italy), and the lack of information about the future monarch's activities from the time of the collapse of Attila's Hunnic empire (453) until Odoacer's arrival on the Italian Peninsula in the early 470s.

According to those who identify the Saxon leader with the King of Italy, Odoacer, having suffered a defeat at the hands of the Franks in 469 or 470, set out from Gaul with a few supporters for Rome . Along the way, he visited Severinus , who lived in Noricum , as mentioned in the life of this saint, written by an eyewitness of the events, Eugippius . In 471 or 472, he took part on the side of Ricimer in the struggle against Emperor Procopius Anthemius.

Odoacer, Leader of the Saxons

In turn, opponents of such identification believe that in late antique and early medieval sources there is no evidence of contacts between the Italian Odoacer and the Saxons, and that in this case onomastic data alone are not enough. As one of the confirmations of this opinion, evidence is given from the "Chronography" of Theophanes the Confessor about the service of the future king in Italy at the time when, according to Gregory of Tours, the leader of the Saxons was still in Northern Gaul. According to E. A. Thompson, the future king of Italy Odoacer visited Severinus in Noricum around 461, that is, several years before the eponymous leader of the Saxons was first mentioned in historical sources.

It is assumed that Odoacer, with whom, according to Gregory of Tours, King Childeric I formed an alliance against the Alemanni, is most likely identical to the ruler of Italy. Thus, the Battle of Angers is the last reliable evidence of the Saxon leader Odoacer contained in early medieval sources.